**Be Encouraged – 2 Corinthians 1:12-18**

Being Misunderstood

Turn with me to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians; we will be looking at chapter one verses 12-18. We are still in the beginning of this letter to the churches in Corinth and the surrounding areas; a letter written to a church that has seen its challenges, that has struggled with the temptations of society, and has had distractions from the true reason why they gather as a church. How many of us know that it is easy for a gathering of people to lose focus on why they come together?

* It’s supposed to be about Jesus
* It’s supposed to be about growing in our relationship with him
* It’s supposed to be about coming together as brothers and sisters in Christ and finding a support system that will encourage each other to keep going, keep fighting, keep believing in their faith.

But how many of us know that it is easy to allow emotions, biases, or even our self-centeredness to get in the way. Paul was the founder of this church, he was the one who initially taught them the gospel, and he was the one who took 18 months of his life to invest in the lives of these people. His focus was on Jesus, yet there were some who were more interested in undermining Paul’s ministry than being all about what the church is supposed to be about.

As we saw last week, Paul had gone through some incredible difficulties for the sake of the gospel, even to the point where he didn’t think he would be able to live through it. Paul had shown his faithfulness, yet there were some who questioned it. I have entitled this message “Being Misunderstood” because there have been times in our lives when we have proven ourselves faithful and we have done so with great sacrifice and yet people will still question our motives. What do you do when you are misunderstood? Let’s look at Paul’s words in verses 12-18 (**2 Corinthians 1:12-18**):

*2We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness\* and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God’s grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you. 13Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can’t understand. I hope someday you will fully understand us, 14even if you don’t understand us now. Then on the day when the Lord Jesus\* returns, you will be proud of us in the same way we are proud of you.*

*15Since I was so sure of your understanding and trust, I wanted to give you a double blessing by visiting you twice—16first on my way to Macedonia and again when I returned from Macedonia.\* Then you could send me on my way to Judea.*

*17You may be asking why I changed my plan. Do you think I make my plans carelessly? Do you think I am like people of the world who say “Yes” when they really mean “No”? 18As surely as God is faithful, our word to you does not waver between “Yes” and “No.”*

Let’s Pray!

There were three groups of people in Corinth that Paul was writing to – those who were excited to see Paul because of their love for him and his ministry, those who still had questions for Paul based on his previous letters, and those who wanted to discredit Paul’s ministry because of what they perceived as a “broken promise”. We read in **1 Corinthians 16:5-7**:

*5I am coming to visit you after I have been to Macedonia,\* for I am planning to travel through Macedonia. 6Perhaps I will stay awhile with you, possibly all winter, and then you can send me on my way to my next destination. 7This time I don’t want to make just a short visit and then go right on. I want to come and stay awhile, if the Lord will let me.*

The problem that some were facing in the church in Corinth was that Paul’s plan didn’t work out; he didn’t spend the winter with the church in Corinth. This opened up gossip within the church that Paul was no longer reliable, he was no longer a man of his word; he was just like a sinful man whose word of promise meant nothing.

This was no merely questioning a man’s integrity, but also his ministry. For those who were stirring trouble were ones who were jealous of Paul’s ministry and wanted the people in Corinth to follow them instead. How many of us know that in this world there will always be those who will undermine others so that they can get ahead? They will look for any opportunity to put others down only to elevate themselves. That is what we have here.

* **Everyone of one of us is incapable of keeping all of our promises.**

Life doesn’t always pan out the way we hoped and there will always be those who will be hurt by our inability to accomplish everything we would like to do. We will let people down, and they will be disappointed, and we will be misunderstood.

Paul wanted to visit the church in Corinth but it didn’t work out that way. Why?

* **Our plans must always give way to God’s plans.**

As much as we would like to think that we are in control, there will be times when God’s plan for our lives will trump our own. I want you to notice however in 1 Corinthians 16:7 what Paul says; that he will come and visit “if the Lord will let me.” Paul was aware that there was a possibility that God would have something else in mind. James tells us in **James 4:13-15**:

*13Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” 14How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. 15What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.”*

We must always concede to God’s plan. Paul’s priority was to do what God wanted and not merely satisfy the preferences of others. Does God have the priority in your life? Is what he wants for your life what you give way to? Does he have the priority to make changes? For Paul, he did. Perhaps that is why Paul is able to state in our text this morning, in verse 12

**Verse 12**

“We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness, and sincerity in all our dealings.” Paul didn’t have any guilt about his choice. Instead he had

1. A Clear Conscience – The Greek word here means “to have proof, or evidence” of moral awareness. In other words, there was a sense of confidence without guilt in his choice; that he had followed what he knew God would have him do.
2. Holiness/ Sincerity – The Greek word here means “purity, innocence, clarity.” Paul didn’t have an ulterior motive.

Paul was settled in that way things played out. The reason why his plans changed was because of God’s leading and nothing else. Paul’s conscience in clear before God.

* **There are going to be times when you make decisions that others will not like or agree with, but you will have a settled and clear conscience before God.** (You know that you know)
* **There are going to be times when you make decisions that others will agree with, but there remains an unsettledness before you and God.** (That nagging feeling)

Verse 12 tells us “we have depended on God’s grace and not our own human wisdom.” In other words, we have learned to rely on God and his leading instead of men. How many of us know that as believers that there will come times when people will not understand our choices? We will be led to do certain things that people will not understand or agree with?

* **There will be times when we will be misunderstood because we follow God’s wisdom which is not always understood.**

Have any of us ever faced this? (Giving, serving, choices) God has always intended for his church to demonstrate his wisdom. **Acts 1:8** Jesus said:

*8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

As witnesses, our lives will prove that living in us is a power that reflects Jesus. If people want to know what Jesus is like, all they have to do is look at God’s people. Unfortunately, many of God’s people have been poor witnesses. They not only haven’t reflected Jesus, but have in fact, demonstrated behavior contrary to what Jesus would do. It is time that we get back to WWJD (what would Jesus do).

**Verse 13**

Paul states in verse 13 that he has been straightforward, with nothing between the lines, nothing hidden; in other words “Don’t read into things.”

* **Sometimes we are guilty of reading into things. What we need to do is stop and take things at face value, assume goodwill, and not get trapped in the possible ulterior motives.**

Sometimes all that is needed is some clarity or discussion for that sake of unity. Jesus taught in **Matthew 5:23-24**:

*23“So if you are presenting a sacrifice\* at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, 24leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.*

What matters is clarity. Clear the relationship. Don’t leave things unsettled. It is in the unsettled silence where the enemy, Satan, does some of his greatest work.

* **At times all it takes is a few minutes of discussion to get clarity and understanding.**

Paul didn’t want anything to come between him and the church in Corinth; he wanted to clear the air because he wanted them to be proud of him, just like he was of them; that’s what he says in verse 14.

**Verse 14-18**

In verse 14, the word “proud” here is not “arrogance” in the Greek, but is more accurately the word “boast or rejoicing.” In other words, Paul wanted to be able think of his brothers and sisters in Christ in Corinth with joy and celebration, he wanted to be able to speak highly of them.

* **May we be a gathering of people who will celebrate and speak highly of each other.**

I pray that we can say the same for one another here, Amen. This can only take place if we are willing to work things out, hear each other out, and live like Jesus.

Verse 15-16, Paul states, “I wanted to come, it was my desire to come.” In verse 17, did Paul change his plans because he doesn’t keep his promises? No. Did Paul change his plans because he had selfish motives? No. There are times when our best laid plans don’t line up with God’s. There will be times when our desire don’t line up with God’s plans. Are we okay with that?

**Conclusion:**

People will let you down and they won’t have the power to meet your expectations. Even Paul, who had already proven himself invested and faithful to the church in Corinth, he was misunderstood and even gossiped about. We will disappoint and let people down. But you know what church? There is one who will never let us down and never disappoint us; his name is Jesus. It is said to always keep your eyes six feet or higher – always look to God. Unlike us, he always comes through. That is what we will be looking at next week. Let’s pray!

**Question:**

Share a time when you were misunderstood by others.